



Quranic Evidence for the Impermissibility of Tawassul Through the Awliya – An Overview and Critique

April 16, 2023 by Abu Dujana

The topic of *Tawassul* is something that has been constantly debated since the time of Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) who seems to be first Muslim scholar to question this practice. The below is a translation of a paper written by Dr Fathullah Nijarzadegan, who is a professor at the university of Tehran and has hundreds of works to his names and holds a PhD in Quranic Sciences and Hadith (see his personal website <http://www.najarzadegan.ir/> for a list of all his works, including some papers in English). The paper attempts at primarily focusing on one aspect of the debate, which is whether such a practice can be compared to the act of polytheists using their idols as a means to gain proximity to Allah, as described in the Quran.

At the outset, it is vital to clearly define the point of contention, for it is possible for both sides to resort to evidence, regardless of whether it is to affirm or negate a point, regarding intercession (*shafā'h*), supplicating through intermediaries (*tawassul*), calling out directly to the Prophet (s) for fulfilling needs (*istigāthah*), gaining blessings from parts of his (s) body and clothes (*tabarruk*) and kissing his hands, **during his lifetime**.

And there is ample evidence for all of this, through the conduct of the companions during his (s) lifetime. Rather, seeking help (*istigāthah*) and seeking intermediary (*tawassul*) through Prophets and saints during their lifetime, is a part of the customs of human societies, and this is identical with *Tawhīd*. The Quran has mentioned several examples in this regard:

"Whenever a plague fell upon them, they would say, 'O Moses, invoke your Lord for us by the covenant He has made with you. If you remove the plague from us, we will certainly believe in you and let the Children of Israel go along with you.' But when We had rem



the plague from them until a term that they should have completed, behold, they broke their promise.” [7:134-135]. These people made Prophet Musa (a) as their intermediary in asking Allah to remove the punishment from them, such as the floods, locusts, lice, frogs and blood (see 7:133). In response, Allah accepted the supplication of Musa (a) and removed the punishment from them through him (a).

And Allah says “...except for Abraham’s saying to his father, ‘I will surely plead forgiveness for you,

though I cannot avail you anything against Allah.’ ‘Our Lord! In You do we put our trust,

and to You do we turn penitently, and toward You is the destination.” [60:4 and see 19:4]. And similarly, the pleading of forgiveness of Prophet Ya’qub (a) for his sons after they had requested him for that, “They said, ‘Father! Plead [with Allah] for forgiveness of our sins! We have indeed been erring.’ He said, ‘I shall plead with my Lord to forgive you; indeed, He is the All-forgiving, the All-merciful.’” [12:97-98].

The Quran also indicates the seeking of forgiveness of the angels for the believers, “*Those who bear the Throne, and those around it, celebrate the praise of their Lord and have faith in Him, and they plead for forgiveness for the faithful: ‘Our Lord! You comprehend all things in mercy and knowledge. So forgive those who repent and follow Your way and save them from the punishment of hell,’*” [40:7] as well as the incident of Abu Tālib (a) doing *tawassul* to the Prophet (s) when He (s) was a child so that it would rain, by asking Allah for rain through the status of the Prophet (s), which is a famously known incident.^[1]

The Quran also mentions regarding *tawassul* through the Prophet (s), “*Had they, when they wronged themselves, come to you and pleaded to Allah for forgiveness, and the Apostle had pleaded for forgiveness for them, they would have surely found Allah all-clement, all-merciful*” [4:64]. In fact, the Quran considers spending in charity to gain the blessings of the Prophet (s) as a part of the intention to gain proximity to Allah. “*Yet among the Bedouins are [also] those who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and regard what they spend as [a means of attaining] nearness to Allah and the blessings of the Apostle. Look! It shall indeed bring them nearness, and Allah will admit them into His mercy. Indeed Allah is all-forgiving, all-merciful*” [9:99].

Also, intercession (*shafā’ah*) and *tawassul* of the Prophets and divine saints, in the context of the Day of Judgement for the sake of seeking refuge from the hellfire or for the elevation of ranks in paradise, is considered to be from amongst the pillars of the beliefs of both the



^[1] Shias. All the above is beyond debate and discussion.

Therefore, the central point of contention in these matters is about them occurring after the demise of the Prophet (s). As such, we should focus our arguments on this specific point. A question therefore arises: Why did these concepts become an instance of polytheism (*shirk*) whilst they were considered in line with *Tawhīd* during his (s) lifetime?

Some Salafis are of the belief that the status of a dead person is like that of a stone or piece of wood, he cannot perceive nor hear anything, and therefore can neither harm nor benefit anyone, and if even the deceased could have any of these powers, it is beyond our understanding, hence a deceased and an idol are both equal in this regard. It follows, therefore, that the practice of *tawassul* and *istigāthah* by the believers is similar to the practice of the polytheists with their idols. This is what lead to the Salafis analyzing this topic from the Quranic lens in which verses are addressed to the polytheists, such as:

"As for those whom you invoke besides Him, they do not control so much as the husk of a date stone. If you invoke them they will not hear your invocation, and even if they heard they cannot respond to you, and on the Day of Resurrection they will forswear your polytheism, and none can inform you like the One who is all-aware." [35:13-14]

Muhammad 'Abdul Wahāb whilst discussing this verse in his *sharḥ kitāb al-tawhīd* says:

"Allah has explicated that the supplication of one who does not hear nor reply is polytheism, and the one being called upon shall reject the caller on the Day of Judgement . . . Therefore, every deceased or hidden person, cannot hear nor respond, cannot give benefit nor harm..."^[3]

As for Sheikh Ibn Bāz, he says, "As for calling out to the Prophets and divine saints, seeking help from them (*istigāthah*), offering vows for them, etc, then it is the greatest polytheism (*shirk al-akbar*) and it was practiced by the disbelieving Quraysh with their idols. . . and they did not believe that it was these (idols) that fulfilled their wishes, healed their sick and helped them against their enemies, as Allah has indicated that in: *"They worship besides Allah that which neither causes them any harm, nor brings them any benefit, and they say, 'These are our intercessors with Allah.'*" So Allah replies to them by saying: *"Say, 'Will you inform Allah about something He does not know in the heavens or on the earth?' Immaculate is He and exalted above [having] any partners that they ascribe [to Him]!"* [10:18]."^[4]

Therefore, the Quranic verses depicting the beliefs of the polytheists constitute one of the proofs that this group present to prohibit such practices. However, it seems apparent that

  reasoning was not used by anyone before Ibn Taymiyyah in the 8th century, for he was the first one to compare the practices of the polytheists with that of the faithful whilst

presuming that both are in reality the same.^[5] His followers and disciples after him have repeated this reasoning after him.

Manāwī reports from al-Subkī, "and it is appropriate to do *tawassul*, *istigāthah* and seeking intercession to the Prophet (s) from his lord, and none from the *salaf* (earliest generations) nor from the *khalaif* (later generations) have rejected this until Ibn Taymiyyah came and rejected this, and turned away from the straight path and innovated that which no other scholar before him did."^[6]

Differences between the beliefs of the faithful and the delusions of the polytheists

If we want to critique the beliefs of the faithful using the aforementioned verses, then it is upon us to first accurately analyze the specificities of the beliefs of the polytheists in order that we may determine to what extent the two are similar. We shall therefore observe verses that discuss the beliefs of the polytheists or address the polytheists, and then compare them with the practices and beliefs of the faithful.

From amongst them:

Firstly, the Deity that the polytheists would worship or would attempt to gain proximity to him through worshiping idols, did not have a real or external existence; for he did not have the attributes of the One God. He did not have resurrection (*ma'ād*), nor did he send prophets and apostles from amongst themselves for mankind, nor did he make certain obligations incumbent on them, nor did he guide them to the right path. Therefore, the polytheists did not believe in the hereafter, they would reject the prophets and would reject the revelation of divine scriptures and would not admit any obligations from their lord. In many verses, Allah has unveiled their delusions:

"but they said, 'Shall humans be our guides?!' So they disbelieved and turned away, and Allah was in no need [of their faith] and Allah is all-sufficient, all-laudable" [64:6]

"If you obey a human being like yourselves, you will indeed be losers" [23:34]

"The faithless say, 'Shall we show you a man who will inform you [that] when you have been totally rent to pieces you will indeed have a new creation?'" [34:7]

*"They consider it odd that there should come to them a warner from among themselves,
the faithless say, 'This is a magician, a mendacious liar. Has he reduced the gods to
god? This is indeed an odd thing!'"* [38:4-5].

Therefore, the God that the polytheists were worshiping was nothing but an illusional God, lacking external reality, a figment of their imagination and conception of their minds, hence their words about their worshiping their idols, "*We only worship them so that they may bring us near to Allah*" [39:3], was nothing but an alleged argument of theirs, for they did not really believe in the real Allah such that they could get close to Him. Perhaps it is for this reason that Allah describes them as liars and disbelievers, for He says in the very same verse, "*Indeed Allah does not guide someone who is a liar and an ingrate.*"

The polytheist attempts to gain proximity to his delusional God and not the true God, the one and only, the one who encompasses all the beautiful names and sublime attributes, that the Muslims believe in. Therefore, the act of the believer in Tawḥīd of gaining blessings (*tabarruk*), *tawassul*, *ziyārah*, etc is counted as a means of gaining proximity to the true God and through His permission, whilst the act of the polytheist is gaining proximity to his delusional God that he has created mentally.

Secondly, the monotheist does not see power but only from Allah and does not seek it from anyone other than Him, "*Whoever seeks power [should know that] power entirely belongs to Allah*" [35:10]. As for the polytheist, he takes deities other than Allah to help him, "*They have taken gods besides Allah that they may be a [source of] power to them*" [19:81]. Similarly, the monotheist only sees help from Allah, "*and help comes only from Allah, the All-mighty, the All-wise*" [3:126] whilst the polytheist takes deities other than Allah for help, "*They have taken gods besides Allah [hoping] that they might be helped*" [36:74], as well as other differences in their beliefs. Therefore, it is not at all possible to compare the practice of a monotheist with that of a polytheist, or to adjudge that the specificities of their mental workings and doctrinal beliefs are the same, or accusing a monotheist with polytheism in an ad-hoc manner and without proof...

An overview of the reality of polytheism and worship

In order to avoid the accusation of polytheism in ad-hoc manner, we shall attempt to highlight some indicative points:

First point

Ascribing partners to Allah is the biggest of sins and is a great injustice that shall not be forgiven, as Allah says "*When Luqman said to his son, as he advised him: "O my son! Do not ascribe any partners to Allah. Polytheism is indeed a great injustice."*" [31:13] and also "*Indeed He does not forgive that any partner should be ascribed to Him, but He forgives anything .t to whomever He wishes. And whoever ascribes partners to Allah has indeed*



fabricated [a lie] in great sinfulness" [4:48 and 116]. Based on this, one ought to avoid accusing any person or action with this great injustice and ugly action that shall never be forgiven, especially if they are from the Muslims who believe in Allah and prophethood and resurrection, except in the case where one has a strong and firm proof regarding that.

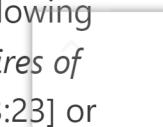
Second point

Worship is exclusive to Allah and only suits Him, and Allah has not permitted anyone to consider themselves – even for a moment – as a deity. For this reason, the prostration of the angels to Adam (2:34) or the brothers of Yusuf prostrating to him (12:100), is not considered as a form of worship to other than Allah.

Similarly, what the believers and monotheists do when circumambulating the Ka'bah and running between Safa and Marwa is not a form of worshiping the Ka'bah or the mountains of Safa and Marwa. Similarly, during the lifetime of the Prophet (s), when they would request for his intercession, or would seek blessings from parts of his body or clothes or would use him as an intermediary when supplicating to Allah for the fulfilment of their needs, and similarly even after his (s) demise, they were of the belief – like every believing monotheist – that worship is exclusive to Allah but these practices were not considered as a type of worship whereas the polytheists would worship their intercessors because they had taken them as deities, as Allah says, "*We only worship them so that they may bring us near to Allah*" [39:3]. It is here that the principal difference between the faith of the believers and the delusion of the polytheists come to fore. So, what does it even mean to compare the two, comparing the Muslim and the Polytheist, whilst the difference between the two is so clear?

There are other points of difference between the beliefs of monotheists and the presumptions of the polytheists, which we shall allude to in our critiques on the epistle of Ustād al-Saqqāf.

Third point

Polytheism can never be proven logically nor can it ever have exceptions (i.e., when it would be permissible), "*Whoever invokes besides Allah another god, which there is no proof for, his reckoning will indeed rest with his Lord. Indeed, the faithless will not be felicitous*" [23:117]. The phrase '*lā burhāna lahu*' (there is no proof for) is a description for 'another god'. Thus, there is no logical proof for the actions of the polytheists. Rather, it is not possible for anyone who has taken a deity other than Allah to produce a logical proof for his act, except the following   *desires and desires of the self, "They follow nothing but conjectures and the desires of soul, while there has already come to them the guidance from their Lord"* [53:23] or 

resorting to the excuse of following what their forefathers did, *"And when they are told, "Come to what Allah has sent down and [come] to the Apostle,"* they say, *"Sufficient for us is what we have found our fathers following."* What, even if their fathers did not know anything and were not guided?!" [5:104]. As for the monotheist, it is possible for him to bring logical proofs for his actions.

Fourth point

It is not necessary for an action of a person to be considered polytheism by the mere accompanying with the action of Allah, and it is also not necessary to consider this as going against *Tawhīd*, for there are many instances in the Quran where Allah has supported this [i.e., instances whereby an action is attributed to both Allah and others]. He has given the Prophet (s) the attribute of 'enricher' (*mughnī*), "...and they were vindictive only because Allah and His Apostle had enriched them out of His grace" [9:74].

And "*But if they desire to deceive you, Allah is indeed sufficient for you. It is He who supported you with His help and with the faithful*" [8:62]. He has considered the believers as supporters of the Prophet (s) [whilst at the same time considering himself as the supporter]. Similarly, the angels are described as regulators, "*and by the angels who regulate the affairs*" [79:5]. Based on the monotheistic outlook, these matters are not considered as ascribing partners to Allah, because they are all actions under the action of Allah and not in line with it i.e., all the creatures in this system do not possess anything essentially and they do not give or have an impact except with the permission of Allah.

This meaning becomes apparent in the discussion of Prophet Ibrahim (a) with Āzar whereby he said, "...I will surely plead forgiveness for you, though I own nothing for you from Allah." "Our Lord! In You do we put our trust, and to You do we turn penitently, and toward You is the destination" [60:4]. Here, Prophet Ibrahim (a) promised to plead for forgiveness but he then said, *I own nothing for you from Allah*, because everything is based on His permission. This is a significant difference between the belief of the monotheists and the view of the polytheists. The polytheist believes that the idols have power and independence regarding existence, as opposed to the monotheistic believers.

Here we must solve two issues:

1. There was no essential change after the demise of the Prophet (s) in the concepts of *tawassul*, *istigāthah* and *shafā'ah* such that we can say those concepts changed from being monotheistic to polytheistic. This is because those believers who were contemporary to the Prophet (s) were of the belief that the Prophet (s) was not

independent from Allah in carrying out these matters, and they would seek these practices as a means of blessing and love and respect for Allah and His Prophet, and seeking cure and blessing from his (s) being, and this belief was widespread amongst the faithful after his demise. We have already mentioned that this is the main point of difference between the faithful and the polytheists.

2. The Prophet is alive after his demise and He (s) hears our voices, as Suyūtī says, "The narrations about the prophets being alive in their grave are *mutawātir*."^[7] And in his book *inbā' al-adhkiyā' bi-hayāt al-anbiyā'*, he also states: "The Prophet (s) being alive in his grave as well as all the other prophets, is known to us as certain knowledge (*'ilm al-qatī'*) due to the proofs that have been established for us, as well as the *mutawātir* narrations that indicate this. And Imam al-Bayhaqi has written a volume on the prophets being alive in their graves."^[8]

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah says, "It has been correctly reported from the Prophet that the earth does not consume the bodies of prophets ... and He (s) also said that there is no Muslim that sends salutations upon him except that his (s) soul responds to him, alongside other proofs that gives rise to certainty (*qat'*) that the death of prophets just means that they have now become hidden from us such that we no longer perceive them, even though they exist and are alive, similar to angels who are alive, though we do not see them."^[9]

Ibn Qayyim reports tens of reports from the *Sīḥāh*, *Masānīd* and *Sunnan* collections regarding the *Barzakhi* (intermediary) life and the relationship between the dead and the living. He says, "The person who wants to greet the people of the graves should say: Peace be upon the abode of the group of the faithful. This is an address to one who can hear and understand for if it was not as such, this address would be like the ones addressed to non-existing or non-living beings. And the *Salaf* (early generations) are unanimous on this and it has been reported in a *mutawātir* manner that the deceased perceives the visitation of the living and is delighted by it."

He also reports many narrations that consist of themes such as: The dead ask about the living and recognize their words and actions, the dead are told about what the living have done after their death as well as what they are going to do, Abu Bakr implemented the will of Thābit ibn Qays which he stated in a dream after his death, etc."^[10]

Thereafter, Ibn Qayyim then begins the exegesis of the verse "*but you [O, Messenger] cannot make those who are in the graves*" [35:22] and says, "The context of the verse indicates it is not possible to make those in the graves listen in a manner that they may benefit

from the speech, and Allah did not completely reject that those in the grave could not hear anything at all..."^[11]

In summary, the Prophet (s) in the realm of *Barzakh* hears the voice of the visitors, those seeking *tawassul* and those seeking his intercession, just as He (s) did in his lifetime by responding to the one seeking forgiveness, *tawassul* and intercession. The cause of seeking blessings from the personal belongings of the Prophet (s) and his grave, and kissing the walls and area surrounding his grave, is love, and was present during his lifetime.

And Dhahabi has correctly mentioned, under the biography of al-Hassan ibn al-Hassan ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib whilst tangentially refuting his teacher Ibn Taymiyyah:

"So whoever stops at the blessed stone in a humble and subservient manner, sending salutations on His prophet (s) then what glad tidings for him! He has performed the visitation in a good manner and has beautifully shown subservience and love. And he has performed a further '*ibādah*' as compared to the one who sends salutations upon Him (s) from his own town or during his prayer, because the pilgrim gets the reward of *Ziyārah* as well as sending salutations upon Him (s) whilst the one who sends salutations in prayer from other cities, only gets the reward of prayer. Whoever sends one salutation upon him, Allah sends upon Him (s) ten but the one who visits Him (s) and does not maintain the proper etiquette of *Ziyārah* or prostrates to the grave or performs that which has not been legislated, then this person has performed both a good act and an evil act. He should be treated with kindness and indeed Allah is all-forgiving, merciful. By Allah, a Muslim does not get annoyed whilst the shouting and kissing of the walls and constant wailing, is nothing but beloved to Allah and His Prophet. His love is the difference between the people of heaven and the people of hell, visiting his grave is the best means of gaining proximity... may Allah grant us and you that, Amen."^[12]

Therefore, these practices are not polytheistic such that we should compare them with the polytheists, neither are they not sanctioned such that we can label them as innovations (*bida'h*). These practices were common amongst the companions and thus it was a custom of the *Sahābah* and the *Tābi'īn*. The companion, Abdullah ibn Umar sought blessings from the pulpit of the Prophet (s) after his demise and none of the companions forbade him. Rather, there are narrations that indicate that other companions also followed suit. Ibn Abī Shayba writes, with his chain of narrators from Yazid ibn 'Abd al-Malik ibn Qasīṭ who says:



"A group of the companions of the Prophet (s), when the mosque became empty, they gathered around the pulpit and began placing their hands on it and supplicating." He says, "and

I saw Yazid do that.”^[13] And Sālim ibn ‘AbdAllah ibn Umar also followed his father.^[14]

As for the Salafis, they say: this action of Abdullah ibn Umar was his personal *Ijtihād* and his father did not support him in this and neither did the rest of the companions.^[15]

However, if these practices are *Ijtihādi*, then you have no excuse in accusing others (of polytheism). As for your words: that the *ṣahābah* and the *tābi‘īn* were not in support of the action of Ibn Umar, then this is a claim without evidence. That is why al-Asqalāni preferred the practice of Ibn Umar in seeking blessings from the remnants of pious individuals and considered his action as a proof.^[16]

Al-Darimi reports in his Sunnan with a Sahīh chain of narrators from Abi al-Jawzā’ ‘Aws ibn AbdAllah who says, “Madinah was struck with a severe drought so people complained to ‘Aishah. She said, ‘Look at the grave of the Prophet (s), and make an opening facing the sky so that there will be no barrier between him and the sky.’ They did that, and it started raining heavily; even the lush green grass sprang up (everywhere) and the camels had grown so fat (it seemed) they would burst out due to the over piling of blubber. So the year was named as the year of greenery and plenty.”^[17]

And Ibn Abī Shaybā reports with a Sahīh chain^[18] from Abī Sālih al-Sammān from the treasurer of Umar, who said, “the people suffered a drought during the reign of Umar, whereupon a man came to the grave of the Prophet and said: ‘O Messenger of Allah, ask for rain for your Community, for verily they have perished...’”^[19]

And Ḥākim has reported with a Sahīh chain, based on the conditions of Muslim and Bukhari, and which Dhahabi has attested to its soundness, from Dāwūd ibn Abi Sālih, who says: “Marwan once passed by and noticed someone place their face on the grave of the Prophet (s), so he grabbed him by the neck and said, ‘Do you know what you are doing?’ He said, ‘Yes.; So he approached him and realised it was Abu Ayyub al-Anṣāri, who said, ‘I have come to the Prophet (s) and have not come to a stone. I heard the Prophet (s) say, ‘Do not cry over the religion if the worthy people take charge but cry over it when the non-worthy take charge.”^[20]

And for those who would like to read extensively, they should refer to the biographies of the companions, for therein are great signs.

Footnotes

  , Sahīh Bukhārī 2”494, H.1008,1009

[2] Bayhaqi, al-I'tiqād alā madhab al-salaf ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamā'ah, p. 104; Nasafi, Sharh aqāid al-nasafiyah, p. 148; Nasir al-Din Tusi, Tajrīd al-I'tiqād, p. 416; Allama Hilli, Kashf al-Murād, p. 416; whereby the latter says "The scholars are unanimous about the intercession of the Prophet (s)."

[3] Al Sheikh, Fath al-majid fi sharḥ kitāb al-tawhīd, p. 430

[4] Ibn Bāz, Risālah ila Sheikh Wāid Zādeh, p. 14

[5] Ibn Taymiyyah, Majmū' al-fatāwa, 1:157; Risālah ila atbā' sheikh 'adī bin musāfir, p. 31

[6] Manāwi, Faydh al-Qadīr, 1:170, number 1508

[7] Suyūti, Mirqāt al-ṣu'ūd, p. 15

[8] Reported from al-Katānī, nadhm al-mutanāthir min al-ḥadīth al-mutawātir, p. 35

[9] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah, al-Ruh, p. 5

[10] Ibid

[11] Ibid, p. 59-60

[12] Dhahabi, Siyar 'alām al-nubalā, 4:483-484, number 185

[13] Ibn Abi Shayba, Muṣanaf, 3:435, H. 15876

[14] Ibn Hajar, Fath al-Bāri, 1:567, number 483

[15] Risālatān bayna al-sheikh wāid zādeh wa sheikh ibn bāz, p. 16

[16] Ibn Hajar, Fath al-Bāri, 1:569

[17] Al-Darimi, Sunnan al-Dārimi 1, Bāb mā akrama Allahu nabiyahu ba'da mawtihī, p. 43. Regarding the sanad of this report see: al-Saqqaf, ta'līq 'alā risālatayn bayna sheikh wāidh zādeh wa sheikh ibn bāz, p. 29



Ibn Hajar, Fath al-Bāri, 2:495



[19] Ibn Abi Shaybah, al-muṣanaf 6:359, number 31993

[20] Hākim al-Nishābūrī, Mustadrak, 4:12 bāb al-fitan wa al-malāhim



Abu Dujana

Abu Dujana is a student of the seminary since 2017 and an avid reader.

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Abu Dujana

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